

Benjamin Dulany House  
601 Duke Street  
Alexandria  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-697

HABS  
VA  
7-ALEX,  
65-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## BENJAMIN DULANY HOUSE

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VA  
7-ALEX,  
65-

Location: 601 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia (northwest corner of intersection with St. Asaph Street)

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. John Howard Joynt

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: The Benjamin Dulany House is one of Alexandria's finest homes thrice distinguished by its architecture, its historical associations, and the connoisseurship of the owners. Richard Pratt in A Treasury of Early American Homes (New York: Whittlesley House, 1949) has called the house "one of the choice examples of early American elegance in the United States."

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: A 1783-1784 building date would seem to be further corroborated by some Dulany manuscripts dating 1785 to 1786 which came to light during repairs to the fabric.
2. Architect: Uncertain but undoubtedly local. Mrs. Dulany's family background invites speculation on this score. She was none other than Elizabeth French, daughter of Daniel French of "Rose Hill." With the publication of William Buckland, 1734-1774, Architect of Virginia and Maryland by Rosamond Randall Beirne and John Henry Scarff, F.A.I.A. (Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society, 1958), the career of French as an undertaker or professional builder is beginning to unfold. He died in 1771 while overseeing the construction of Pohick Church. William Buckland, the subject of the biography, died three years later but John Ariss was a member also of this triumvirate which apparently worked closely together. The former Miss French doubtless knew Ariss and other craftsmen with whom her father was associated in the construction business. She could well have had a hand in the selection of workmen as well as the interior treatment, perhaps selecting details from books in her father's library.
3. Original and subsequent owners: This house was built by Benjamin Dulany of Maryland and is considered by historians

to have been the home which General and Mrs. Washington visited on February 21, 1785 when they dined with the Dulanys. On that occasion Washington completed a property negotiation for lands adjoining Mount Vernon which Mrs. Dulany inherited from her father, Daniel French.

In the summer of 1799, the Dulany's acquired their country place on Shuter's Hill from the Ludwell Lees (Fairfax Deed Book B-2, p. 452) and in the spring of 1800 Benjamin Dulany inserted an advertisement in the Columbia Mirror and Alexandria Gazette: "TO RENT--The House in town I now live in . . ." Alexandria Tax Records for 1807 indicate that the property was occupied by Edward Stabler and had an assessed value of \$4,500. It was Stabler who founded the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop which is a local landmark and museum.

To summarize however, the chain of title--Robert J. Taylor acquired the house from the Dulanys in 1810 and he left it to his wife in a 1840 will. From this time on the property has been owned by only two other families until acquired by the present owners in 1934.

4. Alterations and additions: Robert J. Taylor has been credited with the addition of the pedimented doorway and the hyphen, now the dining room, between the kitchen and the main block.

Taylor was an eminent lawyer of Alexandria and an active vestryman of St. Paul's Church. The story is more than plausible that Benjamin H. Latrobe, architect for the church, had a hand in the work. Certainly, the high stuccoed arches, the pilasters, and harmonious proportions achieve a solution that is esthetic as well as practical. Taylor's will (Will Book 4, p. 163  $\frac{1}{2}$ ) significantly, perhaps, mentioned the "dwelling house, lot of ground and improvements at the intersection of Duke and St. Asaph Streets."

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Builder Dulany is often mentioned in Washington's diaries as his companion at the hunt and frequent visitor at Mount Vernon. He was a member of Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 in 1785, but apparently the only official activities he participated in were a dinner at Wise's Tavern on June 24, 1784, on the anniversary of St. John the Baptist, and the laying of the cornerstone of the Capitol in Washington, September 18, 1793.

The tradition is firmly entrenched that the Marquis de Lafayette addressed the citizens of Alexandria from the stoop of this

house in 1824. Alexandria gave him an enthusiastic welcome. Good will and sentiment prevailed for the duration of his visit. Robert I. Taylor's daughter, Rosalie, was selected from the hundred young "females in white, with blue sashes and badges, and leghorn bonnets," to greet General Lafayette with a welcoming recitation on October 16. That night her father attended the banquet at Claggett's Tavern and proposed one of the many toasts--"The American Navy, Honor to the Brave."

Lafayette's toast to Alexandria merits recall: "May her prosperity and happiness more and more realize the fondest wishes of our venerated Washington!"

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Newspaper articles as cited and Alexandria Tax Records 1791-96.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Alexandria Association. Our Town 1749-1865, Likenesses of This Place and Its People from Life by Artists Known and Unknown (Richmond: Dietz Printing Company, 1956).

Antiques Magazine, "The Alexandria Home of Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Joynt" by Margaret Nowell (February, 1945).

Beirne, Rosamond Randall and John Henry Scarff. William Buckland, 1734-1774, Architect of Virginia and Maryland (Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society, 1958).

Brockett, F. L. The Lodge of Washington, 1783-1876 (Alexandria, 1890).

Moore, Gay Montague. Seaport in Virginia, George Washington's Alexandria (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1949).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The late and esteemed architectural historian, Thomas T. Waterman, frequently referred to the extraordinary persistence of the Georgian tradition in Alexandria where earlier styles and building details lingered long after the Revolutionary War. Waterman relates the Dulany House with its rich mid-century trim to the paneled dados, modillioned cornices and chimney pieces in the 1790 ballroom of Gadsby's Tavern. In the Dulany

House, however, occur enrichments of the type probably intended for Gadsby's but never carried out (see Thomas T. Waterman, The Dwellings of Colonial America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950)).

Despite the row-end facade with pent across gable exhibited along St. Asaph Street, and its typical side hall plan, the Dulany House has an individual character unlike any other local residence. The east end presents an almost monumental solidarity with only four windows widely spaced in the corners of the building. The moulded cornice with dentil courses continues across the gable to form a pediment with a central bull's-eye window to light the attic. This treatment again recalls the late addition at Gadsby's as do the pilastered dormers with arched sash, front and back. This comparison undoubtedly would be heightened had brick-work never been painted.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent; probably having undergone fewer alterations or "improvements" than most Alexandria buildings of comparable age.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main portion of the house, approximately 32' x 45' deep, rises two-and-a-half stories above a high basement and has a three-bay front. Beyond an ell extends about 40' in depth with setback to form a courtyard.
2. Foundations: Aquia stone, stuccoed to height of basement window sills.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Brick, Flemish bond on front where there is a water table and stringcourse; common bond elsewhere. Sawtooth brick cornices are employed throughout the entire ell. The facade is painted a pale grey.
4. Porches, stoop, bulkheads: The high entrance stoop is built of Aquia stone and is embellished with a recessed panel. There is a straight run of eight risers; treads have nosings. The railing is wood with wooden newel and wrought iron balusters.

Evidence of the original opening to basement appears at the southeast corner of the building where a small cast-iron door was subsequently installed. The original bulkhead was obviously removed because it obstructed the sidewalk.

5. Chimneys: Three, one on main block and one in each section of ell. The massive interior chimney at east end of main block combines two stacks which unite in the attic space.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The pedimented doorway faces south. It has reeded pilasters, frieze ornamented with rosettes, and semicircular fanlight. Eight-panel door with corresponding jamb treatment. The delicacy of the doorway in contrast to the bolder woodwork treatment within suggests an early nineteenth century origin for the frontispiece.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Windows of the main block have flat arches, wooden sills, and louvered shutters. Six-over-nine light double-hung sash at second floor with nine-over-nine windows below.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable roof
  - b. Cornice, eaves: A moulded cornice with denticulated course is continuous across gable end.
  - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Two dormer windows with pediments jut out from the roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Side stair hall plan with double rooms to the side. The ell as it is now developed is a long "Flounder Wing," so-called for its high west wall and its two-story east wall which results in a roof that is a shed or half a gable. Originally, the north section or kitchen, with end parapets, was likely detached. The section between this building and the main house is believed to have been added after 1800. It is now the dining room which is reached by a short flight of stairs from the back of the hall. The stair landing gives access to the second floor of the ell.
2. Wall and ceiling finish: Fine woodwork combined with plaster walls and ceilings. The stair hall is papered. While the dining room cannot boast the distinguished wood trim of the main house it displays some exquisite hand-blocked antique wallpaper.
3. Special decorative features, trim, cabinet work: The hall arches, cornices, mantels, overmantels, cupboards, dados,

crossetted architraves, raised panelled doors, and stairway are notable examples of early craftsmanship in the Georgian style.

4. Hardware: By and large original and of good quality.
5. Lighting: Period lighting fixtures of museum caliber.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The Dulany House faces south and the integrity of the setting has happily been preserved. The large evergreen garden west of the house is a welcome oasis just off the main traffic artery between Washington and Mount Vernon.
2. Historic landscape design: A feature of the garden is a fence of brick piers and wrought iron panels above a low brick wall, undoubtedly contemporary with the main house. The capstones of the piers are outstanding examples and the overall concept is reminiscent of the enclosure of the grounds of the White House.
3. Outbuildings: The remarkable brick stable which still stands at the northeast corner of the property was previously a subject of the HABS report VA-447.

Prepared by Worth Bailey, Consultant for  
The Historic Alexandria  
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Edited by  
Antoinette J. Lee  
November 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was a cooperative effort of the Historic Alexandria Foundation and the Historic American Buildings Survey to document some of the most important early Alexandria residences for the HABS collection. The historian was Worth Bailey, an Alexandria resident and former HABS employee. Photographs were supplied by Victor Amato. The material was edited in 1975 by Antoinette J. Lee, working on contract with HABS.